

***Iowa Outdoors***  
**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
**www.iowadnr.com**

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[editors: hold this story until March 4]

## **ICE CONDITIONS DETERIORATING QUICKLY**

DES MOINES – Ice on many central Iowa lakes is becoming unsafe and anglers wanting to have one final ice fishing trip of the season should use caution. Ice on southern Iowa lakes has been questionable at best for the past week, and many of those lakes are nearly ice free.

“We have some reports of people going through the ice in southern Iowa lakes and farm ponds. There were also reports of anglers falling through at Big Creek last weekend. People need to use good judgement and if they must go out on the ice, head to northern Iowa,” said Rod Slings, recreational safety program supervisor for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

The warming trend over the past week is causing ice to melt near shore and ice toward the middle of the lake to become weak. Wind and rain will speed the melting process. Signs that ice is deteriorating include a honeycombed appearance, cupping and the color will turn black. Lakes with areas of moving water will loose ice fast.

“Some lakes still have pretty good ice, like at Clear Lake and other northern Iowa lakes, but how much longer will that ice lasts – I don’t know,” Slings said.

Anglers should check the ice conditions often, bring at least 50 feet of rope, wear a personal floatation device and should not go out alone.

“The best advice I can offer is, if the ice doesn’t look right, stay off,” he said. “I would hate to end the ice fishing season on the wrong side of the ice.”

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## **WINTER STRESS IS CAUSING GIZZARD SHAD TO DIE**

DES MOINES – Winter can be a difficult time for fish, especially fish like gizzard shad. Iowa is at the northern range for gizzard shad and the cold Iowa winters stress shad causing them to die. It happens wherever shad are found in Iowa.

The DNR has received two fish kill reports in the past 24 hours. The first report was in the Des Moines River near Eddyville and the second was in the Mississippi River at Davenport. In both instances, the fish are gizzard shad.

“People are really aware of dead fish and when they see dead fish they think something must have killed them, well, in the case with gizzard shad, it is occurring naturally,” said Marion Conover, chief of the DNR fisheries bureau.

“It’s a natural thing that happens every winter. The extent of the shad kill just depends on how severe the winter is,” he said.

The dead shad will serve as food for channel catfish in the lakes and will float downstream in rivers to open water where hungry eagles will dine. Not all shad in the system will die. Remaining shad will reproduce this spring and summer and fill the void.

**For more information, contact Mick Klemesrud at 515-281-8653.**

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## **ANTLER SCORING WORKSHOP SET FOR MARCH 20**

ONAWA - Monona County Conservation Board is hosting an antler measuring workshop at 10 a.m., Saturday, March 20, at the Arboretum, 318 East Iowa Avenue, in Onawa. The public is invited to bring in their antlers to be measured. Official scorers for the workshop are Jens Bruun and Tom Sorenson.

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## TRACKING CRAPPIES THROUGH THE ICE

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Walk. Stop. Listen. Holding the black box in one hand and a wand-like antenna in the other, Maury Anderson circled the backwater ice listening to the high pitched 'blip, blip blip' emitting from his radio receiver. Stepping over remnant drifts of snow and refrozen slush, his pattern tightened until he set the unit on the ice. He was sure of the spot. "He's right here. Hear how loud the signal is? We are right on top of him," Anderson declared.

Below, sat a black crappie; number 10-05 in Anderson's logs. It was tagged in the fall, on the Mississippi River south of Camanche. Through the winter, Anderson, a fisheries technician at the Department of Natural Resources fisheries station at Bellevue, tracks 10-05 and up to 30 other crappies and bluegills. Where they spend the cold weather months is the central element in a multi year research project.

Earlier research showed that, despite where anglers catch them throughout the year, largemouth bass rely on very specific winter habitat; often traveling miles in search of it. Biologists expect similar data as they study 10-05 and the other panfish 'holed up' in backwaters around here. "Everything has its habitat," explains Anderson. "Deer, pheasants; fish are no different. They need certain backwaters; little or no current, four to six feet of water and sufficient oxygen to make it through the winter."

Breaking out his equipment, he notes the location just off the main channel. A submerged tree angles toward it, indicating good habitat in the branches below. He augers through eight inches of ice, with four feet of water below. The thermometer he drops through records 1.6 degrees Celsius. The dissolved oxygen level, though, is of most interest. "It's at 15.3 parts per million," Anderson notes. Skeptical of the high reading, he re-calibrates. It comes back the same. "It is very important for fish to have sufficient oxygen," he emphasizes. "We've had eight or nine parts per million recently. Sometimes, in late winter, that level gets dangerously low; just two or three parts per million. That's when the fish are gasping for breath."

Lose the oxygen and the schools of fish in these backwaters would die. Heavy snow cover curtails underwater photosynthesis, through which vegetation gives off oxygen. Any oxygen in the ice is locked up until it melts. And that ice cap is a barrier to oxygen in the air dissipating into the water. Ice also could block any exit from certain backwaters. On this day, though, runoff from the fast fading snow pack is likely a cause for the welcome readings.

Normally, fish can weather low, late winter oxygen, though it could lead to stress in upcoming spawning periods. In the past decades, though, a problem is developing from below. Slowly, siltation is filling these critical winter havens. "These backwaters used to be eight feet deep," says Anderson. "Now they are three feet; two feet deep. Take away a

foot of that with the ice and you're looking at a foot of water in some places. That's not enough for these fish. They need more than that."

Nearby, a couple knots of ice anglers tested the waters. A couple bluegills were all I could count. However, these guys are regulars; knowing there was good habitat below. The radio telemetry project is working to recognize the best spots. "We want to document that fish stay in an area. There are rehabilitation projects available—dredging—for key areas," says Anderson. "They are expensive, though (one to two million dollars each). They only pick out one or two a year. We need to find the *best spots* for fish and make them better."

Money stems from mitigation dollars tied to extending the lock and dam at Alton Illinois over a decade ago. The Corps of Engineers administers the fund, which has already restored Mississippi River habitat identified by the DNR at Brown's Lake near Green Island. Trenches dredged in the backwaters, buy a few more decades in the 'best of the best' habitats. "It's tremendous habitat now," confirms Anderson. "It's an excellent fishing area (too)." Bussey Lake, above Guttenberg was another area identified in the past few years. The telemetry work helps identifies others; as does work in Illinois, Wisconsin and other upper Mississippi River basin states. Still, the siltation continues.

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## **THIS SPRING IS A GREAT TIME TO PLANT TREES**

DES MOINES - More than 8 million trees and shrubs were planted in Iowa last year for conservation efforts on private and public lands, according to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

"This year the State Forest Nursery and several private Iowa nurseries have good supplies of Iowa grown conservation tree and shrub seedlings available for the spring planting season," said John Walkowiak, chief of the DNR's forestry bureau.

"There are good supplies of white, red and bur oak, black walnut, silver maple and 39 other species of conifers, hardwood trees and shrubs available from the State Forest Nursery in Ames," Walkowiak said.

These conservation trees and shrubs are bareroot seedlings from seed collected in Iowa and range in size from 8 to 24 inches. Prices remain unchanged this year, ranging from \$.25 for an 8 to 16-inch tall conifer, such as Norway spruce, to \$.45 for a 17 to 24-inch tall hardwood tree or shrub, such as the oaks. Plants are sold in quantities of 100 and a minimum order of 500 plants is required.

Landowners wanting to plant a smaller area for wildlife habitat, the State Nursery offers three wildlife packets of 200 trees and shrubs for \$90 and a 20 tree and shrub backyard wildlife habitat packet for \$20.

Anyone interested in establishing Farmstead Windbreaks should consider contacting a private Iowa grown nursery that offers larger conifers or transplants in smaller quantities and they can go to [www.iowatreeplanting.com](http://www.iowatreeplanting.com) for a listing and contact numbers.

To order conservation seedlings from the State Forest Nursery call 1-800-865-2477 8-4:30 PM Monday through Friday, or for more information on tree planting or other sources of nursery stock go to the new web site [www.iowatreeplanting.com](http://www.iowatreeplanting.com)

**For more information, contact Walkowiak at 515-242-5966.**

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## **CONSERVATION OFFICERS RECOGNIZED FOR OUTSTANDING WORK**

GUTHRIE CENTER – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources law enforcement bureau recognized 10 conservation officers for outstanding service over the past year during its annual meeting on Feb. 18.

Craig Lonneman, conservation officer for Polk County, was recognized as the 2003 Shikar-Safari Wildlife Officer of the Year. Lonneman, who has been with the DNR since 1994, gave much of the credit to his fellow officers in his district.

“It is a privilege to work with my fellow officers in the district,” he said. “Receiving this award so early in my career is a little overwhelming. It certainly took me off guard.”

Lonneman’s wife, Pam, was recognized as the Spouse of the Year.

Officer Matt Rush (Wapello and Davis counties) was honored as outstanding officer of the year by Whitetails Unlimited. The award recognizes the officer who is involved with successful investigations and prosecutions of major deer cases.

The award for the Outstanding Case of the Year went to Iowa officers Craig Roberg (Clarke and Decatur counties) and Marc Roberg (Union and Ringgold counties), and Missouri Agent Bill Lenhart for their work solving a large deer and turkey poaching case.

Lonneman, along with Officer Craig Cutts from Warren County, received the Iowa Division of the Izaak Walton League Outstanding Fish and Game Officer of the Year for outstanding devotion to the preservation of natural and recreational resources.

Conservation officer Dallas Davis (Iowa and Keokuk counties) was recognized as the Iowa Bowhunter's Association Conservation Officer of the Year for outstanding success in make significant deer cases with the assistance of the public through the Turn-In Poachers program.

Conservation officer Andrea Bevington, from Pottawattamie County, received the Outstanding Boating Law Enforcement and Water Safety Education Award for demonstrating extraordinary performance in boating law enforcement, accident investigation/reconstruction, education and public relations.

The Outdoor Heritage Award was presented to Joli Vollers for her long-standing commitment and extraordinary work with Becoming and Outdoors Woman, Outdoor Journey for Girls programs and the Iowa Women in Natural Resources organization.

Chris Flynn, conservation officer for Jefferson and Van Buren counties, was nominated by the National Wild Turkey Federation as the Iowa Law Enforcement Officer of the Year. Flynn will now be in the running for the national officer of the year award. He was recognized for his efforts to catch illegal poachers and protect Iowa's natural resources.

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[Hold this story until March 4]

## **PRELIMINARY 2003 DEER HARVEST, AERIAL POPULATION SURVEY**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Iowa hunters put a big dent in the state's deer population this past season. That is just what wildlife officials wanted, to check the growth of whitetails. Credit goes to a big boost in antlerless deer tags, encouraging hunters to take more does.

"We have preliminary results, from a 1,200 hunter telephone survey," explains Willy Suchy, deer biologist with the Department of Natural Resources. "We expect the harvest to be about 165,000 deer, which is substantially more (up 25,000) than last year. Hunters used the antlerless tags available. We probably took more does than bucks, which is exactly what we needed."

That survey was undertaken to give the Iowa Legislature a handle on deer numbers, while it is still in session. In a normal year, harvest data comes together after early April spotlight surveys are added to postcard questionnaire with hunters, statewide

road kill figures and more than 300 winter aerial counts. The data fills in the blanks as wildlife managers work to balance deer numbers with public demand and worries that some areas have too many.

Most winter surveys are carried out from low flying planes. Spotters on each side count deer as they pass over sectors at roughly the same time—and in similar conditions--each year. Though they don't provide total *numbers*, the counts provide an index; showing whether deer are up, down or the same from area to area. Fresh snow cover is a must. Otherwise stumps, logs and deer beds melted through to grass look just like whitetails, as spotters pass overhead at 500 feet, moving 80 miles an hour.

Most of Iowa had a couple weeks of that, in January and early February. Results are back from about three-fourths of the routes. With a belt of late snow, spotters could scramble the aircraft again, to finish. Computer models can adjust for fewer surveys, less snow...and even more snow. "The results are kind of mixed," Suchy explains. "With better snow cover, we see more deer (and) we are seeing about ten percent more. That doesn't mean there are ten percent more deer. That's why we need the rest of the information."

The key to reducing the population, of course, is to harvest more does, and reduce the number of fawns this spring. That's been a tough sell to many hunters, who grew accustomed to shooting bucks over a half century of Iowa deer seasons. Many of us got the message, though. Suchy says if those preliminary figures are borne out, the 2003 harvest should include 87,000 does, up 20,000 from last year and a nearly ten percent increase in the deer harvest.

Talking with hunters during both shotgun seasons, I noticed that most parties had a least a couple extra antlerless tags. And they used them. Antlerless, special zone or depredation tags let us take about four extra deer during shotgun and late muzzleloader seasons. Better positioning this fall during the bow season should let me bring back more than one doe, and maybe even that nice eight-point buck with which I had a long November stare-down. But that's another story.

Suchy anticipates recommending more of the same, in 2004 license allowances. "We will look at results, to fine tune county by county quotas. I would be surprised if things change very much from last year (other than) bumping up quotas in some places. We just have to (review) final results."

### **Helicopter Counts Preferred in Urban Areas**

With increasing attention to deer in urban areas, helicopters are the preferred method for counting whitetails. "They will take us down lower and can hover while we get a solid count," says DNR wildlife biologist Tim Thompson. "We want a better count in these park and urban areas. Fixed wing craft (airplanes) don't give us a chance to see that deer next to a backyard deck."

Thompson, based in Iowa City, works with helicopter pilots to carry out counts in Iowa City/Coralville, Kent Park, Lake Macbride and the Coralville Reservoir corridor. A couple days of snow cover would be enough to fly most of the areas. The Iowa City area count is always a priority, after the city paid sharpshooters \$100,000 to kill 200 deer and in Coralville, where bow hunters took about 100 deer, at no cost to the community.

While helicopters would bring survey crews down close for more precise counts, cost and availability work against them. “A helicopter costs three to four times as much as an airplane,” says Thompson. That is why the practice is limited to park and urban areas, where smaller areas need to be surveyed, and more accurate numbers help management.

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